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ABSTRACT

After an informal study of 589 college freshmen enrolled in reading courses at Bishop State Junior College (Alabama) revealed that most students read out-of-class assignments only sometimes because of the degree of difficulty of the reading tasks, a series of directed and structured activities was developed to promote reading comprehension. The basic concept underlying the planned activities is that students can experience success in reading by following an analytical process for studying textbooks, poems, short stories, and novels. In the textbook chapter analysis exercises, the emphasis is on helping the student see how textbook chapters are arranged, and the detailed worksheet helps the student grasp the idea of structure. The objective of the poetry analysis assignment is to enable the student to understand that poetry has two levels: literal and figurative, while the purpose of the short story assignment is to assist the student in identifying the elements common to the short story. The novel analysis exercise helps the student identify the common structure and content of the novel, by reducing key elements to simple words and phrases--filtering out the trivial details to develop a full understanding of the novel. After using these analysis exercises for one-quarter of the school year, 511 students responded to an assessment item. Of the 511, 427 students indicated these directed activities were helpful for reading comprehension. (Sample worksheets are attached.) (NKA)

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USING DIRECTED READING ACTIVITIES TO INCREASE STUDENTS' RECEPTIVENESS AND COMPREHENSION OF LITERARY FORMS

Keflyn Xavier Reed

College students, especially those enrolled in remedial and developmental reading courses, resist many opportunities to read prose and poetry assignments. These students often experience difficulty with reading assignments and are thus unlikely to engage in voluntary and independent reading activities. This attitude has a direct impact on students who receive assignments involving literature, especially.

Of 589 freshmen enrolled in reading courses at Bishop State Junior College (Mobile, AL) during the 1985-86 academic year, 422 (71.6%) indicated that they read out-of-class assignments at least sometimes. The students were asked to respond to the following item:

To what degree do you read out-of-class assignments?

The response frequencies were

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Almost Always	Always
43 (7%)	124 (21%)	173 (29%)	161 (27%)	88 (15%)

Using the same student population, it was determined that 436 students (74%) found the out-of-class reading assignments to range from average to very difficult. The students were asked to respond to the following item:

How do you rate your out-of-class reading assignments?

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The response frequencies were

1	2	3	4	5
Very Difficult	Difficult	Average	Easy	Very Easy
62 (10.5%)	169 (29%)	205 (35%)	102 (17%)	51 (8.5%)

Several planned activities can be used effectively to foster positive attitudes toward reading and to increase students' comprehension of written material. The basic concept used for the planned activities is that students can experience success in reading by following an analytical process for textbooks, poems, short stories, and novels.

The objective of the textbook chapter analysis assignment is to enable the student to see how textbook chapters are arranged. The information provided on the worksheet will enable the student to get a grasp of the structure of chapters, an idea of the chapter's content, and the understanding that the textbook is a resource and reference tool which may be used effectively. Students must identify the name of the textbook, the title of the chapter to be analyzed, what they think the chapter will be about, if there are questions at the end of the chapter, what the headings and subheadings are, if the book contains a table of contents and index, and terms that need to be defined before the chapter is read. (Refer to Attachment A.)

The objective of the poetry analysis assignment is to enable the student to understand that poetry has two levels: literal and figurative. Through an analytical process, the student is directed to find literal information about a poem,

providing the basis upon which figurative or interpretive concepts can be built. Once the literal elements have been identified, the student can re-read the poem to concentrate on possible figurative meanings. Students must identify the title of the poem and author of the poem, the setting, a literal summary of the poem, the type of poem, explanation of symbolism, figurative language, and key terms; and a personal reaction to the poem. (Refer to Attachment B.)

The objective of the short story analysis assignment is to enable the student to identify the elements common to the short story. Through the use of an actual story, students can achieve a two-fold purpose: to understand the structure of the story in general, and to understand the selected short story in particular. Students must identify basic elements which include the author and title, the setting, main characters, point of view, episode, and elements of plot (i.e., basic conflict, beginning situation, complicating incident, climax, and conclusion). Once the basics have been identified, students can be guided to develop higher-level comprehension of the short story. (Refer to Attachment C.)

The objective of the novel analysis assignment is to enable the student to identify the common structure and content of the novel as a work of literature. Students are directed to reduce key elements to simple words and phrases. Once these elements are separated from trivial details, the student can more closely develop a full understanding of the novel for a secondary purpose (e.g., to teach, to inspire thought on a controversial topic or issue, to amuse, to entertain). Students must identify

the name of the novel , information of the author (which must often be gained from an encyclopedia or biographical dictionary), the theme of the novel, the main characters with brief descriptions, and the elements of the synopsis. Students are also encouraged to add a personal commentary. (Refer to Attachment D.)

Overall, the results of using the activities with students at Bishop State Junior College have been quite good. At the end of the spring 1986 quarter, 511 students (78 either withdrew from school or were absent when the assessment was completed) responded to an assessment item. Of the 511, 427 (83.5%) indicated that the analytical assignments/worksheets were at least helpful. The students were asked to respond to the following item:

To what degree have the directed reading activities (analytical worksheets) been helpful to you?

1	2	3	4	5
Not Helpful	Doubtful	Average	Helpful	Very Helpful
9 (1.7%)	24 (4.7%)	51 (10%)	312 (61%)	115 (22.5%)

The item above provided the justification that the directed reading activities used were perceived as helpful and in getting students to read the works of literature required in their classes. Inventories and profiles given to students at the beginning and end of each quarter consistently show that students' attitudes toward reading material improved as a result of the worksheets developed by this author. Remedial and developmental students particularly like to complete worksheets, for they provide a definite objective for the students to work toward completion.

Also, the student perceives that the teacher has done most of the work for him/her, thereby encouraging the student to make some modicum of effort.

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Attachment A

TEXTBOOK CHAPTER ANALYSIS

Name _____ Date _____

Name of the Textbook _____

Author(s) _____

Publishing Company _____ Date _____

Title of the Chapter to Be Analyzed _____

_____

What Do You Think the Chapter Will Be About? _____

_____

Are There Questions at the End of the Chapter? _____

List One of the Questions, or Turn One of the Subheadings into a Question

_____

_____

Provide the Answer _____

_____

On What Page Does the Table of Contents Begin? _____

On What Page Does the Index Begin? _____

List Three (3) Terms in the Chapter with the Definitions

1- _____ _____

_____

2- _____ _____

_____

3- _____ _____

_____

How Many Chapters Are in the Textbook? _____

In What Course Is the Book Used? _____

Attachment B

POETRY ANALYSIS

Name _____ Date _____

I. Title and Author

Title _____

Author _____

II. Summary (Literal)

_____

_____

_____

_____

III. Point of View, Mood, and Tone _____

_____

IV. Explanation of Symbolism/Figurative Language/Key Terms

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

V. Personal Response/Reaction _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

VI. Type of Poem _____

VII. Purpose of the Poem _____

Attachment C

SHORT STORY ANALYSIS

Name _____ Date _____

I. Title and Author

Title _____

Author _____

II. Setting

Time _____ Place _____

III. Main Characters

_____

_____

_____

_____

IV. Point of View

_____

V. Episode (the plot condensed into one sentence)

_____

_____

VI. Plot

Basic Conflict _____

_____

Beginning Situation _____

_____

Complicating Incident _____

_____

Climax _____

_____

Conclusion _____

_____

Attachment D

NOVEL ANALYSIS (BOOK REPORT)

Name _____ Date _____

I. Name of the Novel _____

II. Information on the Author

III. Theme of the Novel

IV. Main Characters (with brief descriptions)

V. Synopsis

A. Setting: Time _____ Place _____

B. Beginning Situation:

C. Complications:

D. Climax:

E. Conclusion:

VI. Personal Comment